

Federal Agency ASAP Users Group Minutes
January 12 - 13, 1999
Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas

The second meeting of the Federal Agency Automated Standard Application for Payments (ASAP) Users Group, hosted by the Financial Management Service (FMS), was held on Tuesday and Wednesday, January 12-13, 1999. The objective of ASAP is to provide a single, easy to use payment and information system for the request and delivery of Federal funds to States, universities, and other recipient organizations.

The purpose of the user group is to provide a forum for the exchange of information between FMS and the Federal Agency users of the system. The primary objective of the Federal Agency ASAP Users Group is to address the business needs of Federal Agencies with regard to the request and delivery of Federal funds. The FMS ASAP project team will use the feedback provided by the users group to improve upon existing system features, as well as to determine new system features to further meet the Federal Agency users' business needs.

A summary of the agenda discussion topics follows.

1. Update on Federal Government Developments

a. CFO Council Decision June 16, 1998

FMS provided an overview of the Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Council decision to reduce the number of civilian Federal grant payment systems to two: ASAP and the PMS system operated by HHS. Major milestones of the decision: An immediate moratorium on further development of agency proprietary grant payment systems; a decision by January, 1999 by each affected agency on which system to use; partial implementation of the chosen system by October 1, 2000; and full migration to the chosen system by October 1, 2002.

b. Y2K

FMS reviewed the status of Y2K compliance testing. The ASAP system itself had been preliminarily certified compliant in 1998, and it will be undergo final certification after the July, 1999 enhancement package is implemented. After that time, ASAP will be subject to the Federal Reserve system-wide moratorium on software changes until after March, 2000.

As of the User Group meeting, four out of five agency batch interfaces with ASAP were successfully tested. (The fifth interface was successfully tested in February, 1999.)

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Financial institutions requesting funds from ASAP via 1031 wire messages are required to test with the Fedwire application and encouraged to test with ASAP. This testing is currently underway.

FMS reviewed the letter sent to agency ASAP users regarding contingency procedures for Y2K. Agencies are encouraged to capture their ASAP transactions and balances on December 31, 1999 and to be prepared to use an alternative means such as ECS for moving funds to their recipients in the event of a contingency. Agencies should coordinate with their servicing Regional Financial Center (RFC) on these matters.

NOTE: Since the User Group meeting, the following development has occurred. The FRB will be producing copies of the ASAP Account Table at the close of business on 12/31/99 that will list all of the accounts, their account status and available balance. These will be distributed either by mail or by Fed Ex to the Agencies. The Agencies are **strongly encouraged to use this special report** rather than generating a large volume of user-requested reports from ASAP on 12/31/99.

c. GAO Audit for 1997

FMS reviewed the system recommendations made by GAO as part of its 1997 audit of the ASAP system. The three system recommendations were: separation of payment request processing and Federal agency capabilities at the individual user ID level; removal of Federal agency capabilities from FMS RFC user IDs; and implementation of an automated control for verifying recipient banking information in ASAP. Solutions to all three recommendations were implemented by the beginning of fourth quarter, 1998.

2. Review of Implementation Efforts From December 1997 to January 1999

FMS discussed enhancements made to the ASAP system since the previous Federal Agency ASAP User Group meeting in December, 1997. These enhancements included:

- ▶ The Data Retrieval capability, implemented in December, 1997, which allows Federal agency users to request a flat file of user specified ASAP transaction information.
- ▶ The Returned Payment Re-Classification feature, implemented in February, 1998, which allows FMS RFC personnel to modify the original classification of a returned payment to an ASAP account.

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- ▶ Remittance Based Payment Request, implemented in July, 1998, which allows payment requestors to request funds based on recipient-defined remittance codes and account for payments in an automated fashion using ASAP's EDI capabilities.
- ▶ Changes to the Payment Request Status Inquiry function, implemented in July, 1998, enabling users to view payment request information at the summary payment level as well as at the account and detail levels.
- ▶ Key Verification of Sensitive Banking Information, implemented in September, 1998 to address the third GAO recommendation listed above.

3. Review of Last User Group Meeting

FMS reviewed the list of agency requested enhancements generated at the December, 1997 meeting and noted that many of the key items had been implemented or are scheduled to be implemented as part of the July, 1999 enhancement package.

One of the items generating interest was an "as-of" account balance inquiry feature. This would allow a user to specify a date for which to see information on the account balance screen rather than just viewing this information for the current cycle date. This feature will not be part of Package 6, but it is on the high priority list for implementation sometime in 2000.

4. Discussion of Upcoming Enhancements

On the first day of this meeting, FMS presented a high-level overview of the upcoming enhancements scheduled for implementation in July, 1999. This group of enhancements will result in significant new features for Federal agency users and addresses important business needs expressed by several agencies, both current and future users of the ASAP system. Because of the scope and impact of these enhancements, FMS spent the morning of the second day of the meeting to present a detailed, screen-based review of how two key new agency functions, Control Account and Agency Review, will work.

The new features include:

- ▶ **Agency Review**, which has two component parts: "**reasonableness checks**" which, when exceeded, result in payment requests being held until Agency personnel approve or reject the requests; and **maximum draw amounts**, which allow the agency to limit how much a grantee may draw from an account on a daily, monthly, or quarterly basis, or in total over the life of the account.

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It was noted that if an agency chooses to use the agency review feature to hold payments pending agency approval, the agency should plan to log on daily to check the review list. It was also noted that if an agency plans to put a recipient or an account on review, then typically the affected recipient has had conversations with the awarding agency as to the reason why review is appropriate well before such a control would be enacted in the ASAP system.

NOTE: Since the User Group meeting, a design issue arose concerning allowing Agencies to specify Agency Review for 1031 accounts. The issue is that when ASAP receives a 1031, it is **REQUIRED** that a response in the form of a 1032 payment or a 1033 reject be sent to the Requestor on the same day. In order to comply with this requirement, FMS/FRB would have to develop a default process to run in the event that the Agency doesn't act on the request on that day. It was decided that we would not code such default processing at this time and therefore **Agency Review will not be available for ASAP 1031 accounts**. 1031 accounts may, however, be **subject to Maximum Draw Amount**, since that is an "instant" system edit that doesn't require Agency action.

- ▶ **Control Accounts**, allowing the agency to create lower levels within each ASAP account. This will facilitate the management of programs in which balances must be maintained at a program level but funds must be drawn and expended at a sub-program or project level.
- ▶ **The Notification Feature**, which will send system-generated messages to ASAP user organizations when certain key events occur - for example, when an available balance is increased or decreased, when a request awaiting review has been approved or rejected, or when new ASAP accounts are added.
- ▶ **Multiple Bank Relationships** - In some cases, recipients are restricted from co-mingling certain funds. This enhancement will facilitate a recipient's routing of funds to multiple destinations.
- ▶ **Summary Fedwire** - Some recipients request funds on a daily basis, and because of the large dollar amounts and nature of the programs, they request payment delivery via Fedwire. The Summary Fedwire enhancement will allow a recipient to combine Fedwire requests from multiple ASAP accounts and reduce overall wire transfer costs.
- ▶ **Cash Management Reports**, to be available upon user request to assist in determining certain balances, draw patterns and number of days between

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settlement dates. Federal agency users may request the reports for delivery via fax or electronic file transfer, and recipients may request the reports for delivery via fax.

There was some interest in being able to sort the Cash Management Report by Account ID. In following up this request, FMS determined that we are not able to add this in to Package 6 as it would require another report sort and format, which means programming time and resources that are not available. As an alternative intermediate solution, regional offices of an agency can enter their ALC, the specific account ID and desired date range on the Cash Management Report prompt. The resulting report will be broken out by RO/account ID (there will just be one line for each Recipient). There will be a total at the end of the report.

There was some interest in being able to request up to a year's worth of data on the report. FMS has been able to increase the date range allowed on the cash management report prompt to 367 days as requested. Also, a column for Group ID has been added to the reports.

- ▶ **Book Entry Adjustment Flag**, which allows Federal Agencies to specify whether or not book entry adjustments may be initiated against a recipient account in ASAP.
- ▶ **User ID Access to Book Entry Adjustment** - In addressing the GAO recommendations, duties were segregated among Agency personnel so that a person performing Agency functions cannot perform Payment Request Processing (including Book Entry Adjustment), and vice versa. The ASAP team has received feedback that Agency personnel would like access to Book Entry Adjustment, since it is a "net zero" transaction and is a valuable tool during reconciliation. Therefore, with the implementation of this package of enhancements in July, 1999, access to the Book Entry Adjustment feature will be added to all Federal Agency users' IDs (except those with Inquiry Only privileges).

5. Internet Initiatives

FMS discussed ASAP's current Internet presence and plans for future use of web technology.

Currently there is an ASAP web site, accessible from the FMS home page, containing basic information about ASAP, answers to frequently asked questions, and downloadable user documentation such as enrollment handbooks, training guides, and payment formats. The URL for the ASAP website is **www.fms.treas.gov/asap**

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Initiatives under development or in the planning stages include recipient connectivity to existing ASAP screens via web browser (scheduled for pilot in May, 1999); refacing of the current text-based ASAP screens to a Graphical User Interface (GUI) environment (scheduled for 2000); and report delivery via the Internet (2000 or after).

FMS is also working with FRB Richmond to provide a computer based training feature for new and existing ASAP recipient users and an automated enrollment feature. Both are planned for no earlier than second quarter of 2000. As an intermediate step to facilitate the current enrollment process, FMS will be using a video starting in 1999 to coach new enrollees on how to complete and submit the various forms.

6. State Initiatives

FMS discussed various initiatives occurring in the recipient community, specifically among the states. The **Intergovernmental Financial Management Improvement Council (IFMIC)** works to coordinate state input and focus representation for efficiently and equitably improving intergovernmental financial management with Federal partners. The **State ASAP User Group** serves as a forum for states in the same way as the Federal Agency User Group does for agencies. [It met on March 10, 1999 in Portland, Oregon.] Finally, there is a pilot underway with the state of **Oklahoma** to automate the delivery and processing of improved remittance information from ASAP to the state's accounting system.

7. Debt Collection

FMS indicated that there is currently no plan for offsetting ASAP payments, and it is anticipated that such offsets would not occur before 2001. ASAP payments are not currently a priority for the debt collection effort.

8. Discussion of Future Enhancements

FMS outlined plans for additional enhancements, including a Voice Response capability allowing recipients to request funds and perform simple inquiries via touch-tone telephone. The ability for recipients to submit batch payment requests will be implemented based upon interest from the recipient community. Finally, the ASAP team is open to continued Agency-requested enhancements.

9. Open Discussion - Topics Selected by the Agencies

There was a good deal of open discussion, much of it concerning connectivity, conversion of recipients to ASAP, and financial reporting. There was also discussion of user documentation and general agreement on the usefulness of a list of actions to take in

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responding to certain system situations (a “cheat sheet” of commands, troubleshooting tips, etc.) FMS will pursue expanding the Troubleshooting Guidelines at the back of the ASAP Guides for Federal Agencies and for Payment Requestors.

FNS-MPRO submitted a list of questions which summarized many that were raised during the meeting. That list, along with answers, is included as Attachment 1 to these Minutes.

10. Plans for Next Meeting

The consensus was that the next FAAUG meeting would take place after January, 2000 at a site to be determined.

Attachments:

- 1 - FNS-MPRO Questions and Answers
- 2 - List of Attendees

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Attachment 1

FNS-MPRO ASAP Questions

1. A permanently staffed helpdesk is needed, with direct access by users.

All users should call their servicing Regional Financial Center (RFC) for questions regarding connectivity, equipment, ASAP system capabilities and how to make use of them, training, and help with resetting passwords, unsuspending IDs, etc.

If the capitol of the state in which you are located is in the Eastern time zone, please call the ASAP Customer Support Staff at the Philadelphia RFC at (215) 516-8021 from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

If the capitol of the state in which you are located is in the Central time zone, please call the ASAP Customer Support Staff at the Kansas City RFC at (816) 414-2107 from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Central Time.

If the capitol of the state in which you are located is in the Mountain or Pacific time zone (and time zones further west) please call the ASAP Customer Support Staff at the San Francisco RFC at (415) 817-7182 from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time.

2. There is a need to extend the password activation period from 30 to 120 days.

ASAP, as an application running on the Federal Reserve's mainframe, is subject to that environment's security package and security rules. The package used is called ACF2. FRB Security Guidelines dictate that all passwords must be changed every 30 days. This applies not only to Federal Agency users, but also to FMS employees, FRB employees, Payment Requestors and Recipient Organizations. Furthermore, this rule is not specific to ASAP but affects all FRB applications using ACF2.

3. When accidentally accessing an unauthorized program, an enhancement is needed that will return the user to the main menu, without creating a security violation.

We have written our access rules as carefully as possible, but in order to avoid having multiple sub-menus to which only certain user groups have access, it has been necessary to combine multiple items onto one menu. If you select a menu item to which you do not have access, you will receive a security violation on the subsequent screen. Security violations and the handling of them is outside of the ASAP application - it is controlled by the ACF2 security package.

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If you receive a security violation, press the "clear" key (this is the Pause or Break key for the keyboard mapping for CQ for DOS) to get to a blank black screen. On the screen type **/for asap** and press Enter. This will return you to the ASAP Main Menu and you can sign back in from that point.

4. When in CQ-DOS, keys sometimes slip back and forth between caps and lower case.

Upgrading to CQ for Windows should eliminate this problem. CQ for Windows is available NOW; contact your servicing RFC if they haven't already contacted you to get information on how to upgrade. A fix to CQ for DOS is also being worked on, but we do not have a distribution date for this fix.

5. Within a program, waiting for a reply to a request is exceedingly timely (modems should be upgraded).

You are welcome to upgrade your modem speed at any time if you would like to continue using CQ for DOS. Keep in mind that if you upgrade to CQ for Windows, you **MUST** have a modem with a minimum speed of 28.8.

6. At the payment request inquiry function there is a need to extend the request dates from 90 days to 365 days.

On the Payment Request Status Inquiry screen, the date range is limited to 93 days because of the large amount of data on the ASAP tables and also because of the number of screens that would need to be assembled in order to present you with a year's worth of data. We cannot increase the date range without significantly impacting response time. This 93-day date range limit applies to all ASAP inquiry screens which present transaction information (i.e., Account Statement Inquiry, Authorization Transaction Inquiry, and Book Entry Adjustment Inquiry).

Note that you may request an Account Settlement Report for any of your ASAP accounts for an unlimited range of dates. Also, for agencies with mainframe connections to ASAP, the Data Retrieval file allows you to receive a flat file of payment transaction data for an unlimited range of dates. Both the Account Settlement Report and the Data Retrieval file are available on user request through the Report Request Processing Menu off the Main Menu in the on-line ASAP system.

7. Busy signals at peak times. With more users there should be more system availability.

Per FRB Customer Support - the number that Agencies are dialing is a national FRB network access number which is used by FRB customers nationwide. Although the FRB

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network has 12,000 dial lines, at peak times it is possible that customers will experience busy signals. The busy signals may also be a result of local telephone network gateways that provide access to 1-800 service.

8. Removal of zero balances for prior periods within a certain time frame.

FNS grantees have requested that accounts with zero balances be closed so that those accounts will not show up on their payment request screens. This is an in-house or policy issue for FNS to decide upon. Please be aware, however, that regardless of account status or available balance, closed accounts continue to show up on Account Balance Inquiry. They may be inquired upon and have reports requested about them. FMS will add to our list of future enhancements that you should be able to specify account status on the Account Balance Inquiry prompt (so that you can specify if you only wish to view open accounts, etc).

Other questions:

Another question that was brought up, although not on FNS-MPRO's list, was about password changes not requiring verification. FMS asked FRB Customer Support about this and was informed that this is part of the IMS on-line transaction processing environment and cannot be changed without adding an additional sign-on screen to the logon process, which is currently not planned.

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